

## Neave Brayshaw and Quaker History

CHARACTERISTIC of Neave Brayshaw was his combination of intensity with manysidedness. To this latter quality may be attributed the slightness of reference, in the memoir of him published in 1941, to his contribution to Quaker history. In amount this was not large : his two well-known books, his articles on George Fox and the Society of Friends in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th edn.), and occasional information in the notes of standard works like *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, comprise the bulk of it. For quality, however, still more for influence, his contribution is fully worthy of grateful record and of study as a whole. Few denominational histories run into three editions in twenty years, as did *The Quakers* (1921, 1927, 1938).

*The Personality of George Fox*, now a familiar title, was a daring title to choose, both for its deliberate narrowing of the book's scope (" a picture of the man, not a consecutive account of his life nor an exposition of his teaching "), and for its assumption that the " personality " of one living three centuries ago might be known. Anyone unacquainted with the author might be forgiven if he expected some semi-romantic account, after the manner of Miss Manning's *More*. To such a one it must be a salutary shock, on opening Neave Brayshaw's book, to observe the quantity of quotation and the detailed notes, with full references to contemporary sources. Undoubtedly some readers thought the amount of quotation excessive, complaining with some justice that it interrupted the author's style and deprived his writing of any flow ; but Neave Brayshaw was not writing for stylistic effects, and later met the objection by modestly asserting his inability " to summarize in my own words the language, often quaint and beautiful, in which our fathers in the faith still speak for themselves ". Again, with the instinct of the true historian, who, though writing of the past, wants to make his labours at once usable by those who come after him, he would take the trouble, where careless pagination made it advisable, to refer to " the latter of two pages numbered 157 ". I remember his using a note in his

*Personality* to point out to me, in a railway train in Normandy, the value of Routh's "verify your references"; Howgill had bidden his daughter, "Learn in thy youth to read and write a little," an exhortation from which Sewel had omitted the words "a little".

The same exactness of scholarship may be observed in Neave Brayshaw's use of historical imagination. A good example of this is his description of Fox's behaviour at Lichfield, an occasion over which Neave Brayshaw was specially concerned because of the wrong impression which, taken alone, it gives of Fox's career. "I lifted up my head and saw three steeple-house spires," says Fox, "and they struck at my life." "As a matter of fact," Neave Brayshaw comments, "Fox did not see the three spires because the central one had been knocked down in the early part of the Civil War." Further, in explanation of his act, Fox tells how he learned afterwards that "a thousand Christians were martyred in Lichfield"; Neave Brayshaw suggests rather that Fox was "under the subconscious influence of a horror of the city acquired in his early years" from his mother, who, being "of the stock of the martyrs", "must have told him" of the recent burnings for heresy at Lichfield. The book's title was not chosen inadvertently.

The fact is, Neave Brayshaw *lived* his Quaker history, so that it seemed almost as if he had been one of Fox's contemporaries. You could not be with him for long without his introducing Fox to tell some joke or to give some exhortation. How he loved to tell the story of Fox's silencing Judge Glynne on the matter of hats!

"Come," said he, "where had they hats from Moses to Daniel; come, answer me: I have you fast now," said he. I replied, "Thou mayest read in the third of Daniel, that the three children were cast into the fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar's command, with their coats, their hose, and their hats on."

Or a schoolboy discussion of feminine inferiority would call forth Fox's reproof of those who asserted that women had no souls, "adding in a light manner, 'no more than a goose'. But . . . Mary said, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord.'" I remember once, when some of the party were complaining that an inn at Evreux was less comfortable and clean than

they thought it ought to be, they were silenced with an oracular "Laddies, William Penn said of George Fox, that he was 'civil, beyond all forms of breeding'; laddies, you try to be like him".

It would, however, be mistaken to think that the *Personality* is in any narrow sense limited to Fox. The booklet is, in effect, a compendium of the Quaker faith, with historical illustrations. Fox's central principle, "that of God in every one", receives early attention, and from this the rest may be observed to flow. As regards oneself, it means that there ought to be no place for yielding to temptation, but a spirit of triumph over evil, of what Neave Brayshaw, with a wealth of quotation from Fox about "being above", "coming over" and "keeping atop", liked to call Fox's "overworldliness". As regards others, the same central principle must prevent us equally from harming them, whether by fighting, by retaliation, or by capital punishment, and from dealing falsely with them, whether by swearing, by inaccurate speech, or by hat-honour; all six of which "testimonies" also are abundantly illustrated in Fox's life.<sup>1</sup>

When the *Personality* is read in this way, the larger work, *The Quakers*, becomes its natural sequel. All the same fine characteristics reappear over a wider area, though the latest edition is disfigured by a distressing number of misprints. The sub-title, *Their Story and Message*, at once indicates the double purpose of the book: Neave Brayshaw was unable to tell the Quaker story without treating it as a bearer of the Quaker message. This did not mean, however, as it might have done in a lesser man, that he saw his subject through coloured spectacles or was blind to the Society's weaker periods. Specially valuable are the chapters on Friends' ministry, a matter which to Neave Brayshaw was perhaps dearer than anything else, chapters in which the quietism, lethargy and over-cautiousness of eighteenth century meetings for worship are sharply contrasted with "the glowing conception of the seventeenth". Another outstanding chapter is that describing the extent of some plain Friends' scrupulosity, as of the one who would tear up

<sup>1</sup> Neave Brayshaw gave his approval to a paper on the lines of this paragraph which I sent him in 1929 in appreciation of the *Personality*.

a penny stamp<sup>1</sup> whenever he sent a note by hand, "in order to be above suspicion to himself of defrauding the Post Office", or of the earlier Friend who gave up music, "but once a year he went to the top of the Monument in London and there, where his action could do no harm to anyone, he played his flute". To have recorded these pathetic details must have called for some courage as well as honesty; but, as Neave Brayshaw justly says, "we shall think less of the eccentricity and more of our indebtedness", for "the indifference of Friends to the world's censure trained them to step out as pioneers of worthy causes without waiting to make sure of any large band of followers".

This willingness to take one's stand in a minority, "amongst the knights forlorn", was the other thing which Neave Brayshaw had most deeply at heart. He used to lament sometimes that Quaker schools were not fulfilling their specific task of breeding the martyr spirit. His admiration for such a spirit, and his conviction of the continued need of it, runs through both his books, and certain phrases in them may well inspire their readers in this direction. He would ask, I think, no greater reward for the writing of them.

It needs great wisdom and great love at one and the same time to foster the refinement, the culture, the graces of life, and, along with them, a mind heedful of the call, *Take thy part in suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*.

In fact, the Christian, whether Quaker or another, is ever called on to bear himself in the world of men as a citizen of the heavenly country, not in the isolation of indifference to the world, and still less of scorn, but in the isolation of love continually misunderstood.

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<sup>1</sup> "At that time the stamp on a letter was a penny," adds Neave Brayshaw characteristically.